1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
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CHAPTER III.

KÛRDISH WOMEN: THEIR BELIEFS.

As Moslem beliefs generally will be described in relation to the Osmanli women, I shall not here discuss them, but merely remark that the Kûrds have the reputation of being very indifferent followers of the Prophet. It is, indeed, a common saying that "A saint cannot come out of Kûrdistan." They are careless and irregular in the performance of their devotions, and not at all inclined to keep the sacred fast of *Ramazan* so conscientiously as do their Osmanli neighbours. They object, for instance, to abstain from smoking between sunrise and sunset, and will indulge in a *nargîleh* at noonday. "The Prophet did not forbid tobacco," they argue; "how could he forbid a thing he had never heard of? Besides, what is smoke?—nothing, or next to nothing." The Turks do not, however, interfere in their religious affairs. Their mosques are served by *imâms* of their own race, Kûrdish Mollahs expound to them the Moslem law, and their children are taught by Kûrdish schoolmasters. But, notwithstanding this fact, the theologians are, as a class, owing to their reputation for rapacity and greed, highly unpopular among their brother Kûrds. To the latter they are,

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flavoring is anise, causes the liquid to become milky in colour. A necessary accompaniment is the mezze (from a Greek word, universal with the liquor) which consists of a large variety of small dishes to be eaten while drinking, ranging from nuts and cucumbers to cold chicken and grilled meat. The red wine of the Nestorians is not used by the officials and officers. Most of them, as a concession to Islam, forswear intoxicants during Ramadan, but the remaining months of the year offer no such obstacle. These gatherings, of which gambling is the prominent diversion, will be met again.

In the household the service of food depends for its character on whether or not guests are present. If members of the family are alone, they eat together, men, women and children, seated on the floor, or, in a few cases, at a table. The place of eating varies somewhat, and can be the kitchen itself, a neighboring sleeping-room, the divankhana, or the courtyard. The food is served in large dishes by the women and these are placed in the center of the gathering. Often silverware and plates are used, and otherwise, only the fingers and a piece of bread. There appears to be little correspondence with social status among the wealthy in this matter, although the poor always eat with their hands. The head of the house takes the first bite, saying as he does so, bismillah, "in the name of God," and others follow him. The servants have their meal after the family is finished. In a family gathering of a larger size, in which men and

of the bowl, two or three. One product of the area is a long wooden cigarette holder, cut from the thin branch of a cherry tree and laboriously drilled, but it has little more than curiosity value for the local people. European cigarette lighters are in great demand, and together with the dagger and the rosary form an important part in every adult male's ensemble. There are several varieties of these, and are Austrian in derivation. Several craftsmen in the town use flint and steel to light their pipes, but this is relatively rare, a survival among the poor and thrifty. Both men and women smoke, the latter as much as their husbands, and there is no restriction on youngsters. Children usually avoid tobacco as a matter of physical distaste, not because of any prohibition laid upon them. During the fasting hours of Ramadan it is considered impolite, if not impious, to smoke on the streets, although tobacco, of course, has no mention in the Quran.

Almost all of the houses are infested with mice, but, insofar as their inroads are not too intensive, they are not regarded as a particular nuisance. Homes of the lower classes, as well as the khan or hotel, are infested with vermin of various types, of which the chief scourge is the flea. Both flies and mosquitos are troublesome in the summer months, and some effort is expended to keep them from infants, but the greater number of adults pay little attention to them. Scorpions and snakes sometimes turn up, and are killed with the greatest possible dispatch.

about the sun, it falls short several weeks each year in relation to solar reckoning. 1953, for example, is 1372 years after the flight in Muslim calculation and only 1331 in our own. The terminology of this calendar is Arabic, although the Kurds have their own words for the days of the week and the seasons. The government uses both the Muslim and the Gregorian systems, and Friday is the weekly holiday. Turning to the Muslim festivals observed by the townspeople, the first occurs on the tenth day of the first lunar month (Muharram), the legendary date of many important events, particularly the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet. In Shiite areas this day and those immediately preceding it furnish the occasion for the most extravagant ceremonies, including a dramatic recitation of the martyrdom and public displays of mourning in which the participants often beat and lacerate themselves. In Rowandiz, however, it is only a day for special prayer and meditation. "The people pray for Hasan and Husayn," it was said, "but there are no demonstrations of grief." The next important date is the Mawlid al-Nabi, "the birthday of the Prophet," which comes on the twelfth day of the third month (Rabi' al-awal). This is a day of celebration on which banquets are held and the servants are given small presents, but the display is not great compared with the two festivals to follow.

The sixth lunar month, Ramadan, is that in which absolute fasting is required between sunrise and sunset of every Muslim. It begins on the eve in which the moon

appears, and, although elaborately printed calendars of the month offering astronomical data are sent out to the villages and towns by pious persons of wealth or commercial establishments in Baghdad, the townspeople prefer the evidence of their own eyes. One is supposed to fast, taking neither food nor water, from that time in the early morning when the colours of a black and white thread can be discerned until the moon is perceptible in the evening. On a hill above the town an old iron cannon, said to have belonged to Kor Pasha, is half-buried in the dirt, and its muzzle, pointing out into the valley, is tied between two short poles. For some weeks previous to the first evening of this month, the barber and dervish, Hajji Mustafa, had collected a great quantity of rags and taken charge of a donation of black gunpowder. On the eve a large crowd of children gathered on the hill near the gun, and cheered and sung while Hajji Mustafa cavorted before them, loading the necessary powder and a charge of rags. When he received a signal from the roof of the mosque, relayed from the mulla, the cannon was fired and the children roared their approval. "My gun," Hajji Mustafa boasted proudly, "can be heard in Erbil." The weapon is fired on each evening until the end of the month, and serves to indicate when the townspeople may break their fast. During the nights of Ramadan, there is much visiting and many banquets during the first few weeks. The shops are open late at night, and the streets are lighted with lanterns.

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Twice during the night, Hajji Mustafa makes a round of the streets, drumming loudly on his giant tambourine. At various points he stops and shouts, Salawat, salawat 'ala al-Nabi, "Prayers, prayers for the Prophet," and in between these stages he sings various songs in Kurdish of his own devising. These two parades are to inform people that they may arise and enjoy another meal before sunrise, but, inasmuch as Hajji Mustafa and the pack of dogs which follows him make a great uproar, there is a certain amount of discontent. "Curse Hajji," the investigator's landlord grumbled, as he rose from his bed in the courtyard.

Four weeks of absolute fasting between sunrise and sunset are not without hardship, particularly for those who must continue to labor. It is considered improper to smoke on the streets, and only one tea-shop, carefully masked, is allowed to remain open during the day. A number of persons make no pretence of keeping the fast, although they do not demonstrate this fact in public, and others, beginning with good resolve, fall from grace after a number of days. It is interesting that Hajji Mustafa, the person who fires the evening gun and makes the nocturnal announcements, the "religious fanatic," for want of a better terms, did not feel bound by such restraints, considering that his extraordinary relationship with God absolved him from the ordinary demands of the faith. Quarrels and fights are more frequent during Ramadan than any other season of the year, and there are "secret eaters"

who suffer from guilty conscience. As a concession to the faith, the government elite foreswear their drinking and gambling parties. Many persons suffer greatly in keeping the fast, and one may exchange greetings with a number whose throats were so parched by afternoon they could barely speak. The younger children and the ill, it might be noted, are not required to fast. The twenty-seventh evening of the month (Arabic, Laylat al-Qadir, "the Night of Power," in which the Prophet was first addressed by the Angel Gabriel) is marked by special prayers and devotional exercises.

The month of fasting is ended by the appearance of the new moon, and this sight begins Jayjani Ramazan (Arabic, 'Ayd al-saghir, "the Lesser Feast"), the festival which occupies the first three days of the tenth month (Shawwal). This is an occasion of the greatest festivity. Almost every family has purchased a sheep or a goat in advance, and these are slaughtered. Their flesh is used in banquets or given to the extremely poor. Everyone in the household puts on their finest attire, and the children receive new clothing and gifts. Presents of money and food are given by the wealthy to their servants and the poor. Family gatherings, accompanied by the largest and best meal the household can afford, take place, and there is public dancing.

The last festival of the Muslim year observed in Rowanduz is Jayjani Qurban (Arabic, 'Ayd al-kabir, "the Greater Feast") which begins on the tenth day of the

> fasted for you and you should come to my help." Out of the night a man appeared who asked me my difficulty. He helped me get the mule to his feet and reload the rice. The two of us were walking along together, talking, and suddenly I discovered I was alone. Khidir Elyas lived long ago and God gave him such power to do good that he disappeared. This is why people ask his help while he is gone. When Jesus will come again with Ahmad the Mahdi, Khidir Elyas must be with them, for otherwise they cannot come.

Persons in Rowanduz who choose to do so fast "for Khidir Elyas" for three days in the fall. Between sunrise and sunset they do not allow themselves food, drink, or tobacco. Others distribute gifts of food or clothing to the poor. Housewives make a sweet called Halaywat Khidir Elyas which is exchanged between households at this time. The exact dates of the observance could not be obtained, save that it "came just before winter." This interesting custom does not have the sanction of the mullas and the purists in the town, and is not followed by all.

With the Sayran and Khidir Elyas observances, the "official" faith of Islam has been left behind, and the next subject of popular religion which requires consideration is the matter of the shaykh or holy man. Occasionally, this title is aristocratic and inherited in the male line, but it is most often accorded to persons who, because of their piety and the miraculous power they seem to enjoy, have acquired widespread reputations. Such as these can be powerful chieftains, noted for their justice, or the most humble of commoners. They are reputed to have the ability to effect miracles during their lifetimes, and this power continues to exist in their graves after death. Many of

this prospered, I obtained a contract to furnish the army with fresh vegetables. I became thus a man of some wealth. 159 792 [443]

There was a man in Rowanduz who had great influence, Sayyid Hussai Effendi Barzani. He begged me to become mukhtar, representative of the people to the government. Shakir Effendi here knows of this. He advised me not to do it, because I did not have great wealth. I did not listen and the qaimmaqam posted an order which appointed me mukhtar of the town. I caught Sayyid Ra'uf and pushed him into a narrow street. "Now I am master of Rowanduz," I told him. Everyone came to visit me, however, and I had to give them free food and clothing. I lost my money, and had to sell my horse, my pistol, and most of my wardrobe. Finally, I had to give up being mukhtar and Ra'uf Effendi was given the post again. [622] [574]

After this, I became sanitary inspector for the Baladiya, the municipality. I asked the qaimmaqam to give me full authority, and Rowanduz was never so clean. I hired a man to shout in the streets that by order of Mustafa Aziz any person who was found throwing rubbish or dirty water in the streets or who neglected to sweep in front of his house or who sold food with dirt in it should be fined. The fine was five dinars, a large sum. I also ordered that those selling food or kitchenware should have their plates shine like silver. I gathered the butchers together and told them they must cover their meat with white gauze to keep off the flies. I secretly inspected the weights, and I found that many merchants were selling less than the proper measures. I covered the top of the stream which gives Rowanduz its water with barbed wire and forbade anyone to bathe in it. No person had the right to wash his feet or his dishes in it. When people saw me, they ran for miles. On my reports, the government collected 170 dinars from the people of Rowanduz, Kawlokan, and Dyana. My salary was not large, however, and no one appreciated what I was doing. People complained to the qaimmaqam about my fines and my orders, and I had to leave the post. [624] [687] [964]

Thus I left this job and went back to my old trade as a barber. You have seen my shop in the bazar and you know that I am the best barber in Rowanduz. I became a darwish and a khalifa (Arabic, "successor," presumably to the Prophet) by studying with some old men, and now I am a great teacher with students of my own. I teach them such things as cutting themselves without pain, piercing their limbs with skewers, and catching snakes. I make up poems and songs in Kurdish. My present duties are to prepare [305] [785] [767]

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

entered the institution which, so far as I could understand, hardly ranked higher than our poorhouse of former days.

The ritual fast in the month of *ramaḍān* began in 1957 on April 2nd. The thirty days during which the orthodox Muslim, whether man or woman, must refrain from eating food, solid or liquid, from tobacco, and from all sexual intercourse, from such time in the morning as it is possible to distinguish between a white and a black thread until sundown, I did not experience during my four months stay in Southern Kurdistan. Nor did I witness the concluding festival day, and the following six days, during which women who have had their menstruation period during the fast month and as a result of this condition of impurity were unable to comply with the fast, can rectify this omission.

On the other hand I did see a woman fasting on her own for a day as a result of a promise to do so[11], believing that by so doing she would bring good fortune to others. The day was July 30th, which, in 1957, corresponded to the first day in the month of pilgrimage. The fasting woman was the wife of the sheikh at Sargalu. I noticed that although she abstained from eating, drinking and smoking the whole of a long, hot day, the temperature reaching 122°F., where abstention from drinking, particularly, demanded an inhuman strength of will and self control, she attended to her domestic duties, which consisted, among other things, in milking goats, cooking and serving meals to a numerous family. Her fast was due to a promise given in connexion with the participation of a relative in a pilgrimage to Mecca, the centre and holy city of the Islamic world, a long, expensive and still risky journey.

We have now reached the fifth and last pillar of Islam, the pilgrimage, in the 12th lunar month. The Coran says in Sure 3, verse 97, that "pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither". Out of the four feminine environments I experienced in Kurdistan, the only women I met who had undertaken a pilgrimage came from the uneducated urban milieu. Of these there were several. In a joint family that owned various shops in the *sūq* and several large cars that were hired out, a woman, her husband and an 8 year old daughter had the year before taken part in a pilgrimage by plane Damascus-Jidda, and two other women in the same family group had made the journey with other pilgrims.

The most complete information about the pilgrimage was obtained from two women of about the the same age who were married to the same business man in Kirkuk. Each had been a member of a group of pilgrims, one going the one year and the other the next. The one had taken a plane via Damascus to Jidda, whilst the other had gone by bus across the Syrian desert to Beirut, and then by ship through the Suez Canal to Jiddah. In the latter case the journey had taken about two months and had cost about 200 Din. (say £200)[12].

In the same way that the returned male pilgrims mark the greatest experience of their lives and their changed position in society by a white band around their headdress, so Kurdish women must observe certain sartorial rules after a pilgrimage. Even among women the head must never again be bared. The light head veil, *sāyəl*, must be worn even in the closest family circle, where other women are allowed to dispense with it. The arm, from elbow to hand, must never be shown naked which is

4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

in common with them. This great feeling of religious affinity dissipates any sense of loneliness and desolation. Five times a day it is the duty of a woman to wash herself and arrange her dress, and to concentrate on something other than her monotonous labours, a right and a duty to withdraw into herself, and to demand this respected by all in the vicinity. It bolsters up a person's self-esteem to know that five times a day one can demand a square metre's space and 3–4 minutes, during which no disturbance is allowed, not even from the naughtiest child; that in this space a person's spiritual side is isolated from its surroundings, yet at one with millions of others praising God, a unity that transcends race and frontiers.

The duty to give alms is the pillar of Islam most closely paralleled in our own society until social welfare took over most forms of private charity.

The fast, like the five daily prayers, is a method of being included in a great spiritual and religious fellowship. By subjecting oneself in the month of *ramaḍān* to the same physical deprivations and suffering as the other adherents to Islam a feeling of solidarity, of affinity, is engendered.

For those fortunate to be able to make it, the pilgrimage is a form of foreign travel that has no counterpart elsewhere. Once more it means entering a great religious association, enduring with others the rigours of the journey and with them assuming a state of sanctity or initiation. The stay in Mecca constitutes a series of ecstatic experiences which women and men who have taken part in them never cease to talk about. These experiences set their mark on the soul and are later outwardly manifested by the clothing rules referred to. In the five daily prayer periods, in the thirty days of the fast, and on the days of pilgrimage, women enter the great congregation of the orthodox on an equal footing with men. These events are such a break in the daily life that they must be considered a spiritual luxury, quite incompatible with the wretched life pattern of our industrialised community. The demands made by Islam on the time of the individual cannot be reconciled with our Western rhythm of life. In return, these demands give to daily life a spiritual content extremely difficult of replacement by anything else whatever. When even a hard-working housewife like the young woman I saw in Balkha, whose daily work covered husband, child, house, mulberry plantation and the milking of goats twice daily in the mountains, felt that she had the right to take the time to say her daily prayers before preparing dough for bread making or before loading the heavy goatskin of water on her back, it must give her a feeling of human worth in the middle of her inhuman labours. She possessed the right and the duty to collect herself five times daily, to be silent and to consider spiritual matters, and nothing in the world could deprive her of this. It is not surprising that the Islamic Kurdish women conducted themselves with calm and dignity. So long as certain inviolable areas of time and thought exist for them, the daily drudgery will never be able to engulf them entirely.

Uncleanliness. During menstruation the women in the educated and uneducated milieu in Sulaimani (from whom I derived information) used home-made rectangular sanitary towels made out of several layers of cotton material with tapes at the four corners. The tapes were tied together two by two so that the towel was suspended from the woman's hips. The waist was not used as a support in any